

Go Home Steve, You're Drunk by tvfordessert

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Summary:

Where Steve's the one who gets drunk at the Halloween party instead of Nancy and one thing leads to another and these crazy kids begin to figure some stuff out. (aka - looking for any excuse for this love triangle to collapse in on itself and season two didn't provide much opportunity for that, so I made my own.)

Go Home Steve, You're Drunk

Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers, and Steve Harrington were like a house of cards and, inherently, a house of cards is not built to last.

Any permutation of the two would work out fine; they could forge relatively happy lives together. But they'd always know, deep in their hearts, that they left someone behind.

Cases like theirs were rare to come by and hard to articulate for anyone, let alone three teenagers in a town abound with supernatural distraction. However, in the case of these three, the stranger side of Hawkins bound them together. That night when they stood under the flickering uneasy lights of the Byers home and staved off a Demogorgon unknowingly planted a seed - a seed that took a year to grow.

The supernatural proved itself a force quite fond of the teens from Hawkins as a series of fortuitous missteps on All Hallow's Eve finally forced their house of cards to fold in on itself.

Nancy Wheeler thought her boyfriend was joking about refilling his plastic cup of "pure fuel" and he thought she was only teasing him when she hinted that he'd clearly had enough already. Yet here they were, her hand locking onto his wrist and jerking it sternly away from the punch bowl.

"Whoa, Nance!" His tone remained as jovial and spirited as usual. "We're having fun, remember?"

"Yes, but you don't have to get entirely shitfaced." The girl dressed as Lana from Risky Business hushed in an attempt to keep their quarrel contained. "It's embarrassing."

"How is this embarrassing you?" He echoed her complaint loud enough to attract the solemn attention of Jonathan Byers who stood uncomfortably at the foyer. "Look around Nancy, this is what normal kids do."

"God, Steve. Why are you being such an ass?" Her tone remained calm, despite the anger she was beginning to crackle through.

There was a fleeting sober fraction of Steve Harrington's brain that knew with absolute certainty that she was right, however that part of his mind was overpowered by the urge to plunge his cup back toward the bowl.

He realized while in the midst of slamming down drinks when he first arrived at this particular party what he was trying to achieve tonight. Steve wanted to drink enough to forget awkward dinners with Barb's family and the inescapable image of a nightmare creature attacking him in the Byers' home. He was wistful for a time when his only concern was the possible judgment of his peers or the status of Hawkins' High School sports teams. He now knew enough to worry that a rustling in the bushes may be the last thing he hears - like Barb.

Nancy Wheeler did not share the same insatiable desire to forget. She carried everything they went through like a burden, a responsibility. Steve couldn't help but resent that a bit. He searched desperately for shared desires of normalcy in her, but she didn't seem to have them. This awakened Steve's dormant insecurity that Nancy deserved someone better than him - someone more equipped to handle what happened last year.

"Steve." She cut him off at the lip of the punch bowl once more and flashed warning eyes onto him - if he continued his jackassery, she had no intention on keeping this interaction polite.

"Stop it, Nance." He dismissively shook her loose but miscalculated her strength and, in railing against it, he saw the remaining contents of his cup splash against the white blouse of the costume they had spent weeks crafting together.

Steve did not need an awkward silence from his peers or a disappointed expression from his girlfriend to know that he fucked up, but he received those consolations anyway.

"Nancy, wait." He called after her as she stormed away towards the bathroom.

The teenage population of Hawkins was far too self consumed to let a couple's drunken dispute damper their fun and they seemed to instantaneously forget this encounter as soon as Nancy Wheeler dropped from their line of sight. That being said, as the party resumed around Steve he felt as though a solitary set of eyes remained on him as he clumsily groped around this stranger's kitchen for supplies to help clean up his girlfriend's costume. Once Steve found some paper towels, he investigated the voyeuristic sensation he felt coming from the foyer.

No one was there. His inebriated mind must've been playing tricks on him because he could've sworn he saw Jonathan Byers by the doorway a moment ago.

Byers wouldn't be caught dead at a party like this. Steve reassured himself. Perhaps someone was just channeling Jonathan's mysterious loner vibe for a Halloween costume.

Steve shook Jonathan's shadow loose from his periphery as he charged headfirst back into the emotional fray he'd created.

"Nancy...Nancy..." He repeated her name like a broken record while knocking insistently on the bathroom door.

He began to slur his words ever-so-slightly while sinking into the wooden frame before him as if it were a mattress.

"What do you want now, Steve?" The boy dressed as Tom Cruise stumbled into his girlfriend as she swung the door open in an

irritated fashion.

Her stance reflected her displeasure as she stood blocking the doorway entirely. Despite the obvious non-verbal cues, Steve barged in and began apologetically heaping paper towels onto her. Nancy closed the door with a subtle roll of her eyes, resigning herself to the fate of managing her drunken boyfriend.

"I'm so sorry, Nance." He clung to her, dabbing a heap of paper towels onto the spill which she seemed to have been handling fine on her own.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, Steve?" She shoved him lightly away. "Seriously, is this your idea of 'having fun'?"

"It's not my fault you're so worried all the time." He defended and then unwisely decided to expound on. "About school. About Barb. About everything."

"I swear Nance," The alcohol goaded Steve to continue with this line of thought. "Sometimes you give me this look and...I don't know, it's like you think I killed Barb or something."

That insecurity that resided deep within Steve was being scratched at once again, he worried he could never truly satisfy the cerebral part of her nature. Steve was able to set these feelings aside for awhile but his girlfriend's increased severity, brought about by the news Barb's parents delivered, reawakened that part of his mind and he knew he was not wearing it well.

"You didn't kill Barb." Her eyes fell sincerely to the sink below her. "We did."

"Don't be ridiculous, Nancy!" He tried to reach for her arm, but she flinched away from his touch. "That's bullshit. Come on, you can't actually think that we killed Barb when we both know it was that...creature."

"No, it's not bullshit, Steve. *This* is bullshit." She gestured at the space between them. "Us. Acting like we're normal teenagers - like we're in love and blissfully unaware that anything out-of-the-ordinary

happened last year. But we know better and we're not doing anything about it."

"Like we're in love?" Steve's wounded voice broke after a moment, honing on to the small portion of her speech that set off alarms in his chest.

It only took a few moments for the novelty to wear off and for Jonathan Byers to ask himself the introvert's favorite question - *what the hell am I doing here?*

Of course, he knew the answer. Nancy Wheeler had a way of talking him into just about anything.

It was her fierce eyes, her flirtatious nudges, and her soft, yet undeniably tough, disposition. Nancy Wheeler's unwavering support gave him the false confidence to do "normal" things like attend Halloween parties with kids his age.

However, the second he walked into this house Jonathan Byers became hyper-aware of his own abnormality. He was likewise swiftly reminded that Nancy was his only friend here and she seemed to be in the middle of something pretty intense with Steve, leaving him to fend for himself in the social minefield that was a high school open house.

The girl in question actually unknowingly stormed past him a few moments after he'd arrived. She was drenched in punch and disappointment and mumbling something under her breath as she made a b-line for the bathroom. Her boyfriend, Steve Harrington, retained similar level of obliviousness toward Jonathan's presence when he followed her down the hall shortly after. He must've truly perfected this wallflower-shtick if his former monster hunting partners couldn't detect his presence.

Surprisingly, Jonathan had actually managed to stumble upon an

interesting party-goer with whom he could hold a decent conversation, however part of his mental energy remained locked on Steve and Nancy.

After the Joan Jett girl he'd been talking to disappeared back into the throws of the party, Jonathan teetered between venturing deeper into the house himself or simply calling it a night.

Before he could determine a strategy, a figure brushed past him. This time his reflexes were quicker and he caught Nancy Wheeler gently by the wrist.

"Jonathan?!?" He could tell she was putting forth a great concerted effort to brush off the kerfuffle with Steve that he'd witnessed upon entering the party. "I didn't think you'd make it."

"Believe me," He smiled, contemplating his place in this unconventional environment. "I'm just as surprised as you are."

"Did you just get here?" She glanced away hopefully.

"Maybe twenty minutes ago." He knew why she was asking but he wasn't about to lie to her.

"So you saw...all that, I guess?" She gestured toward the general vicinity in which the incident had occurred.

"Yeah." He answered quickly. "Are you guys alright?"

"Well, Steve's a bit..." Nancy faintly smiled as she remembered their conversation from earlier that day. "Sheet-faced."

"I noticed." He admitted. "But isn't that the whole point of this thing?"

"Steve seems to think so." Her bitter tone tipped Jonathan off that the two may not have resolved whatever issue they'd ran into.

"Hey," He wondered back down the hallway, with genuine concern. "Is he okay in there?"

"Yes." She offered readily, though she knew it wasn't necessarily true. "No...maybe - I don't know. Things are...complicated."

"Does he -" Jonathan was not sure where this offer was coming from, maybe it was just his desire to ditch this party or perhaps there was a deeper reason which he couldn't quite grasp. "Does he need someone to take him home?"

"I drove us, thankfully." Nancy remembered, though she didn't seem particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of the impending ride home.

"I suppose we've both done enough damage here already." She resigned.

"Nancy," Jonathan stopped her. "You stay, have fun. I can take Steve home. This isn't really my scene anyway."

"Are - are you sure?" This offer hit Nancy as equal parts surprising and enticing.

"I'm serious, Nancy." He assured her with a pat on the shoulder. "Enjoy your Halloween."

"Your costume looks great, by the way." He threw in the compliment as he disappeared down the hall to retrieve her boyfriend.

Nancy watched Jonathan Byers slip away, donning an expression of pure bewilderment.

Jonathan knew he found the right door when he heard an inebriated Steve Harrington faintly cursing behind the wooden frame.

He knocked firmly to alert the other boy of his presence.

"What?" Steve practically threw the door off its frame to greet the knocking on the other side.

Up close and personal, Jonathan was able to fully recognize the physical and emotional damage this night had done on Steve Harrington. The drunk boy wiped his forearm harshly against his sniveling face - *had he been crying?*

Before Jonathan had a chance to ask, Steve practically toppled over as he brought his arm down and completely missed his intended

target of the doorframe. Jonathan juttied an arm out to catch Steve at his side. Once there, he slid said arm behind Steve's back to co-sponsor the boy's unstable weight.

"I think it's time we get you home, Harrington."

Without much protest, Steve allowed the reserved boy to lead him out of the party. In his drunken haze, Steve missed all the odd looks thrown at them as they headed out whereas Jonathan had just grown accustomed to the judgment of his classmates by now. Kids silently moved around the pair as they made their way to the entrance.

When Jonathan reached to pull the door closed behind him he found Nancy Wheeler's face watching intently; he allowed her a brief smile and nod of reassurance before exiting the party.

It was colder than Jonathan remembered and he suddenly felt a pang of guilt as Steve's breath clattered helplessly against the air. Though Jonathan wasn't quite sure what happened between Steve and Nancy, the boy's mumbling indicated a lack of closure.

"Shit." Steve almost tripped over the uneven terrain as they stepped off the driveway toward where Jonathan had parked.

Jonathan chuckled lowly and found an unexpected smile dance across his lips.

Once they reached the car, Jonathan opened the passenger door and steadied Steve into the vehicle. He reached down afterward to adjust the seat as Steve would likely require more leg room than Will; Jonathan took this opportunity to recline the seat as well since his passenger already seemed to be dozing off.

After situating Steve, Jonathan rushed over to his side eager to start the car and alleviate some of the chill settling in the air, though he knew his jalopy took a lifetime to warm properly.

While starting the car he glanced down at Steve who was practically horizontal, his troubled eyes fluttering in-and-out of consciousness.

Jonathan navigated out of the tricky area, flooded with cars and the occasional costumed teenager, in silence. He assumed Steve was

asleep until they hit the main road and he shifted under the uncomfortably familiar weight of eyes studying him.

"What?" Jonathan did not glance away from the road, but he couldn't bear the sensation any longer.

"I can see why she likes you." Much to Jonathan's unease, he didn't feel Steve's eyes wavier from their position on him.

"Who? Nancy?" This conclusion was guided by process-of-elimination rather than ego, though it did cause Jonathan to wonder what exactly the couple had fought about tonight.

"Yeah, my girlfriend's got a real soft spot for you Byers." He reported factually, not jealously. "If she's even still my girlfriend."

"Look," Jonathan chimed in as he drove. "Whatever happened tonight, I'm sure you guys will work through it."

"You two are good together." He added after a moment.

Jonathan realized as he said these words that he meant it them deeply; he'd never wanted to admit it to himself but Nancy and Steve complemented each other nicely. He desperately wanted to see some fault in their relationship, partly because he still pined for Nancy but, mostly because he spent his entire life convinced that normalcy was a front - then along came this couple who had seemingly achieved a true happiness within the confines of normalcy.

"Bullshit." Steve disrupted the sentiment. "At least that's what Nancy thinks. Apparently, it's all bullshit."

"It's not, Steve." Jonathan finally allowed his eyes to drop momentarily from the road to comfort the boy beside him. "Trust me. I see the way she looks at you."

"And who could blame her," Jonathan quickly pivoted his tone to avoid dwelling on his own angst-ridden heart. "You're giving Tom Cruise a run for his money."

Jonathan was, of course, referring to his Risky Business get-up which surprisingly few people had commented on all night so, naturally,

Steve flashed a charmed smile.

The boys completed the last leg of their journey in content silence. Steve must've actually fallen asleep because he looked around dazed and groggy when Jonathan threw the car into park in front of the Harrington residence.

Jonathan made his way around to the passenger side of the car at the perfect time to assist Steve who was struggling to climb out on his own.

"Here." He stuck out his hand and Steve grasped onto the lifeline.

After Steve was steadied and upright, the two resumed the tandem walking act they'd started at the party as they made their way across the expanse that was the Harrington's front lawn.

The porch was dark as they approached and Jonathan noticed an overturned bowl that had evidently been picked over by trick-or-treaters. He thought back to his mother and Bob when he had left earlier that night; the two had been so excited to greet kids knowing full well that their run-down home on the edge of town would likely only see a handful of trick-or-treaters. As he stared at the discarded candy bowl, Jonathan thought about the sacrifices his mother would make for a home like the Harrington's.

An intolerance of the cool night air snapped Jonathan back to reality as the pair came to a halt in front of Steve's door.

"Um," Jonathan attempted to grab the attention of the figure slumping further into his arm, who had yet to notice they'd stopped moving. "You have a key?"

"Oh yeah." Steve pointed sloppily down at a decorative rock next to the mat. "The rock."

Jonathan leaned down carefully as not to disrupt Steve's fragile balance and blindly reached under the rock until he felt the small metal key. This simple task took great effort with Steve still hanging off of him like a clunky accessory.

Steve took a clumsy lead as they made their way inside, guiding them

haphazardly to his bedroom. The instant his bed entered his line of vision, Steve broke loose of Jonathan and dove onto the mattress with open arms.

Jonathan was just as hastily going to shut the door and leave the boy to rest, but something about the scene before him caused hesitation. He figured he'd already been manhandling Steve for a good portion of the evening, so there was no harm in continuing with that behavior in order to prevent him from vomiting on himself.

Jonathan walked over and looped his arm under the boy's waist, turning him onto his side. After that, the sober boy gently tugged the covers over his friend-of-sorts as Steve returned to his habit of mumbling incoherently.

This improved sleeping arrangement put Jonathan's mind at ease, but he still felt as though a piece of the puzzle was missing. He looked back to the door where he spied a small trashcan. He slid the bin to the side of the bed near Steve's head just in case things took an unpleasant turn later in the night.

He finally felt as though he could leave in good conscious but, as he headed in that direction, he felt a hand calmly clasp his wrist.

"Thanks." Steve acknowledged rather lucidly. "For everything."

"Yeah, no problem." This took Jonathan aback awkwardly, luckily for him Steve wasn't going to remember any of this.

"Jonathan?" He heard Steve Harrington's voice test the air, just as he reached the doorway.

"Yes?" Jonathan already had one foot in the hallway.

"This might sound weird," Steve prefaced. "But could you, maybe...stay here tonight?"

"Um...sure." Jonathan wasn't sure why he found himself agreeing to Steve's drunken whim, but there was something in his voice that felt sincere - that needed him to say yes.

"Then, I guess I'll just be downstairs if you need me." He had spotted

a couch on their way in that seemed comfortable enough.

"Why will you be downstairs?"

"Um..sleeping on the couch?"

"Nonsense." Steve announced proudly, like the drunk host he'd become. "There's plenty of room."

Steve was fervently tapping around his own body to the space behind his back. While there was technically room for another person, *plenty* of room seemed a bit of an overstatement.

Despite its absurdity, Jonathan found himself settling awkwardly into Steve Harrington's bed and as he did so an immense sense of déjà vu washed over him. Jonathan laid uncomfortably on his back, he was as close to Steve as he could be without touching him which is when he realized that he'd been in this exact position before, about a year ago - with Steve's girlfriend.

As a distant and slightly voyeuristic wallflower, Jonathan tried his best to keep his thoughts in check - he tended to let remote observations substitute for actual interaction and, in doing so, miscalculate his degree of closeness with people. However, these mirrored instances where he'd found himself in the beds of both Nancy Wheeler and Steve Harrington served as a tangible confirmation that he played some actual role in their relationship, though what exactly that role was remained undefined.

His body remained stiff and uncomfortable as his mind became wrapped in a sense of ambiguity. These conditions were not typically conducive to sleep, but Jonathan found himself drifting off none-the-less.

Jonathan Byers was startled awake by a light thud against his chest. As harsh daylight burned his retinas, he slowly recollected the prior evening's events.

"Morning Nance." Steve Harrington spoke into his pillow as he lay face down, a hung-over arm draped lazily across Jonathan's torso.

Jonathan took that as his cue to depart before having to explain this situation to Steve. He gently lifted the boy's arm and slid out from underneath it. The sunlight quickened his pace as he realized he still needed to circle back home - where his mother was likely worried sick about him - and pick up his brother for school.

"Thanks mom." Nancy Wheeler closed the passenger door of the minivan her mother had kindly allowed her to borrow the night before.

When Steve didn't show up at his regular time to pick her up, her mother offered her the ride to school. Karen Wheeler coyly probed in the car about the whereabouts of her daughter's boyfriend on this particular morning, but Nancy wasn't quite sure how to respond.

The usual hubbub of the Hawkins' High School parking lot had died down by Nancy's late arrival allowing her to clearly see Steve Harrington's car perched in its usual spot. She expected to be bothered by the sight but she was so unclear on where they stood after last night that she couldn't necessarily blame him.

Nancy entered the crowded halls of Hawkins where students were squeezing in their last moments of socializing before the homeroom bell sounded.

"Nancy." She turned hoping to find Steve, though any rudimentary assessment would indicate that the soft-spoken voice clearly belonged to Jonathan Byers.

"Hey," She tucked her hair behind her ear. "Thanks for taking Steve home last night."

"Oh yeah," He attempted nonchalance, but his voice dropped a few octaves and his eyes darted away from her. "No problem."

It was only when she stopped at her locker that Nancy got a good look at Jonathan's more- disheveled-than-usual appearance. The

Byers' boys weren't particularly known for their fashion, in fact, Nancy was fairly certain that Jonathan only owned a total of four outfits . However, it struck her that this seemed to be exactly what he had on yesterday only a little worse-for-wear. She bit her tongue; the Byers' weren't wealthy and perhaps there was no more to it than that. But Nancy couldn't shake the feeling that *something* in her world had irreparably changed in the past twenty-four hours and neither Jonathan's attire nor his attitude was helping to quell that feeling in her gut.

"Have you seen him?" She tried to affect a casual tone to cover up for the time she'd wasted staring blankly into her locker.

"No, he didn't drive you in today? I saw his car in the parking lot." Jonathan gestured behind him in the direction of Steve's parking spot outside.

"I don't think he wants to talk to me." She said all-the-while noting that Jonathan's eyes seemed to have been scanning around for the same car that hers had this morning.

"To be fair, Nancy." The pack in the halls was thinning, but Jonathan just leaned casually on the locker beside hers. "I don't think he remembers much from last night. He was pretty...sheet-faced."

Their joint ironic love for that terrible pun caused them to share in a clever grin as the homeroom bell reverberated down the hall.

Nancy's inherent sense of punctuality caused her to fumble for the last books she needed in a panic.

"I'm sure everything will be fine, Nancy." Jonathan added, placing his hand on her shoulder reassuringly before rushing off to his own homeroom. Nancy had plenty left to say, but he had vanished down the hall before she could muster so much as a goodbye.

A bizarre mood lingered in the air around Nancy Wheeler all day. She couldn't focus in any of her classes, her mind was preoccupied with planning the fastest route to Steve. Unfortunately, she realized that there'd be no convenient time to get to him until the end of the day when he had basketball practice. But what would she even say to

him? Much like all the problems on her Chemistry pop quiz, she was drawing a blank.

It felt like an eternity, but that final bell eventually sounded and Nancy bolted to the gymnasium. Though she made record time, basketball practice was somehow already underway. She paused outside the double doors where she could see the new kid from California zeroing in on her boyfriend with hungry, insidious eyes.

Nancy Wheeler understood that her boyfriend was adored by nearly the entire female student body of Hawkins but, despite that knowledge, she never once felt jealous or insecure in their relationship. Steve Harrington made it abundantly clear that his world revolved around her. This is part of what made her feel so guilty about her relationship with Jonathan Byers. She would never cheat on Steve, but she could not honestly define her relationship with Jonathan as strictly platonic.

As her eyes fluttered between Steve and Billy, who circled him like a buzzard, she realized that her perspective may have been a bit narrow. It was clearly not only the girls who desired Steve. And maybe that worked the other way? Perhaps she was not the only one in her relationship who felt a pang toward Jonathan Byers.

When she firmly grasped onto that thought, it was as if the fog that had been swirling in her brain all day finally cleared.

Finally having something to say, Nancy strode into the gym confidently and approached the edge of the court where the team was practicing. Steve locked eyes with her across the gym and tapped out.

"What's up, Nance?" He asked as he jogged towards her. There was no sense of resentment or contention in his tone, Steve seemed normal and unaffected.

"Um yeah, can we talk?" She asked lowly.

"Sure." He glanced back to the team.

"Outside." She clarified.

"Be right back, guys." The basketball player halfheartedly called to his teammates.

"You can't just leave in the middle of practice, Harrington." Nancy heard one of the coaches cry, but by that point they were already making their way out of the gym's heavy double doors.

Nancy ducked off to the side of the athletic building to allow them some privacy and once they got there Steve pulled her into a tight, affectionate embrace. As he leaned down to kiss her, she backed away trepidatiously.

"Hey, where'd you go this morning?" Steve wondered aloud, perhaps positing that his girlfriend's disappearance earlier in the day may bear some connection to the solemn expression she now wore.

"What are you talking about?"

"This morning," He playfully pinched her side as if everything were normal. Jonathan was right, he really didn't remember a thing. "I felt you there when I rolled over, but by the time I actually came-to you were gone."

"What are you talking about, Steve? I wasn't-" That very instant, glass shattered in Nancy's mind. "Oh my god!"

"What?" Steve drew a perplexed smile; she'd never seen someone so out-of-the-loop on events that transpired in their own bed.

"I knew he was wearing the same clothes as last night." She whispered to herself.

"He what now?" Her boyfriend inquired. "I'm right here, you know."

"That wasn't me." She began to explain to the puzzled basketball player. "Steve, this morning - that was Jonathan."

"Jonathan who? Jonathan Byers?" He let out a confused laugh - he was severely lost, but got the sense that she must be teasing him in some way he'd yet to decipher.

"Yes, he was at the party last night and -"

"Okay," Steve jumped in. "Now I *know* you're lying. Jonathan doesn't go to parties. I bet you ten bucks he was at home reading Vonnegut or listening to the Talking Heads."

Nancy was ready to recount last night's events, but the familiarity of his sentiment froze her momentarily. Those were *her words* she had just thrown them snidely at Jonathan yesterday, but Steve wasn't there. She wasn't sure how, but Steve clearly knew Jonathan as well as she did; a privilege the guarded boy did not allow many others in Hawkins.

"What?" Nancy recovered her slack-jaw to find Steve's eyes eagerly upon her demanding some clarity.

"Well, he was at this party." She circled back.

"Why?" Steve was struggling to envision a world where their brooding peer could have any fun in such an atmosphere.

"I invited him." She shrugged, though she knew the statement was far from innocuous.

"Oh." As she saw the boy's doubt evaporate, she felt that familiar pang of guilt.

"Yeah, well," She bounced on her heel and glanced down to her feet. "You should be glad I did because - I don't know if you remember this but - you were really drunk...and we had a fight."

"I remember that!" He proclaimed proudly, though he knew it was far from his greatest moment, he was glad to demonstrate that he held some loose understanding of what transpired the night before. "Well, I don't remember the details but I know we made up because you woke up in my bed and..."

"...we didn't make up, did we?" He scratched his head and shot those same puppy-dog eyes he had in the bathroom last night.

"No, it wasn't me this morning it was -" She began her reassertion.

"I know. " Well he still didn't have any concrete facts, but he was beginning to realize that his understanding of the Halloween party

may be an editorial version of the truth. "I mean, at least you told me it was Jonathan but I don't really see how -"

"He took you home last night." She reported. "Do you really not remember that?"

"It was that bad, huh? Our fight?" He glanced down at her with apologetic and worried eyes.

A light fall breeze filled the small passage between them and brought with it a contemplative silence.

"Listen, Nance." Steve finally broke, wishing desperately that he could remember. "Whatever I did last night, I'm sorry."

"No." He stopped fidgeting and met her response with a quizzical expression. "It wasn't you."

"At least not entirely," He gave her time to elaborate, so she did after a moment. "You may not remember this, but last night you asked me whether I really loved you."

Last night, Nancy was able to view this as entirely Steve's problem - he was drunk, insecure, and unfairly demanding but, in the light of day, maybe he wasn't wholly out-of-line. Drunk or not, her boyfriend had sensed she was grappling with an emotional reality that she had consciously been excluding him from. What Barb's parents had told them about hiring a private investigator had opened a great deal of floodgates and she was holding Steve complicit in her guilt all-the-while not sharing it with him. What transpired last year had corrupted Steve's ability to live a normal life, he'd always know something greater was out there and she saw how deeply he wanted to forget. On the other hand, Jonathan understood the repercussions of what they had witnessed and would not hesitate to take the plunge with her to investigate it more thoroughly - after all, he already understood normalcy was overrated. These conclusions were merely projections, however, projections she had made on both of them without ever asking and that was something that had to change, especially since Nancy was coming to realize how deeply she needed both of them on board.

"You couldn't answer." While Steve still didn't remember this exact exchange, her silence on the matter began to fill him with a sickly and familiar emotion.

"No." Her eyes fell again.

"Can you answer now?" He bravely ventured after a moment, knowing this could be the end of something he held so dear.

"I can." She was firm in both tone and eye contact.

"But I'm not gonna like the answer?" He braced. Surely this was it, the other shoe he'd been waiting to drop the moment he fell for her.

"I honestly don't know how you're going to feel." She looked at him very intently. "I'm just figuring that part out myself."

"Nancy Wheeler," He knew he'd have to ask again; this time with sobriety, sincerity, and a willingness to listen. "Do you love me?"

"Yes." He sighed in relief, but sensed there was more to hear.

"But I love him too." She finished.

"Jonathan, huh?" He almost smiled in spite of himself.

"Jonathan." She confirmed.

"What does this mean?" This had started to become a little too much for Steve and he sunk into the brick wall behind him for support. "For us?"

"Can I tell you what it means for me?" Nancy knew what she wanted and it made perfect sense to her - but this wasn't something normal people did.

Steve Harrington, who had endured a physical and emotional workout, simply nodded as he leaned against the wall in his practice uniform. Nancy Wheeler was the most brilliant person he knew and he was more than willing to listen to anything she had to say.

"I'm beginning to think that *us*." She gestured her arms emphatically

at the space between them. "Is bigger than just you and I."

Steve closed his eyes, suddenly wishing he could sink deeper into the wall until he disappeared into the building at his back.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?" Her eyes pried.

"I do." Steve spoke firmly but avoided her gaze. He fought a Demogorgon last year so he couldn't really find this proposal strange, though he knew it would be for most people. But they weren't most people which he supposed was yet another case in which Nancy was right.

"And?" Nancy drew his attention back to her expectant gaze.

"And...yes, I guess. Me too, I mean -" This was not normal for him, maybe for anyone, and she had to know from his encounter with the Demogorgon last year that unusual things took him awhile to wrap his head around even when they've been standing in front of him the entire time. "To be clear, you're saying - you think it should be the three of us?"

"I'm saying that I think it always has been." Nancy's mind remained back at that night, despite its danger, she'd never felt more alive and complete than she felt with the two of them at her side.

"You're thinking about that night aren't you?" In their year as a couple they had scarcely revisited the events of that particular evening, but they seemed to be realizing there was more than a monster to discuss.

"It was kind of a great night, wasn't it?" They both smiled and, for the first time in the past year, Nancy's heart felt oddly at rest. She was not only able to finally articulate this dormant part of herself, but someone else *heard* and reciprocated those feelings.

"Now what?" She finally asked, feeling jittery and ill-prepared - there were no examples set for her on how to begin a journey like this.

"I guess we talk to Jonathan." Steve suggested from his position against the wall; he too looked eager to reunite their monster hunting trio.

"Harrington!" A shrill and disgruntled voice disrupted their moment - causing both parties to jump slightly. "We need you man! That douchebag's killing us, let's go!"

"I'm coming, I'm coming." Steve assured his teammate but his eyes, having regained their flirtatious twinkle, remained on Nancy causing her to giggle and causing the sweaty basketball player to grow more frustrated.

"Come on!" He whined irately.

Steve lightly grabbed the back of Nancy's head and pulled it toward him, placing a kiss on her forehead before jogging back to the gym.

"Find him." Steve called back to her before clearing the alleyway. "I'll meet you two after practice."

Nancy Wheeler smiled and triumphantly leaned against the wall behind her.